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ABSTRACT

With 7 adult sponsors, 40 students from 4 Massachusetts high schools participated in a successful 3-week-long summer trip in Maine. Intended to provide students with realistic challenges to help them gain a sense of pride and accomplishment, the program took one group of students down a Maine river and the other group on an 800-mile bicycle trip to Canada and back. Both groups then met for hiking, climbing, and a three-day solo wilderness experience. Cost to each student was $60; total cost to the project was $2900, excluding gear and salaries. During the trip, informal evaluation by the adults resulted in immediate adjustments of the program when possible and in improved plans for the next summer's program. Results of a formal follow-up questionnaire sent to student participants indicated that 38 of the 39 respondents were glad they had participated. Twenty-seven felt the relationships they formed were the most important aspect of the trip. Other important elements were the physical challenge, the new skills, the co-ed environment, and the natural beauty. Most of the students kept a log of their experiences, including the solo which they all thought was valuable. The staff was pleased with the cohesiveness of the diverse group. (SB)

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PROJECT ADVENTURE

SUMMER TRIP - June 25 - July 16, 1972

An evaluation of a three week trip involving forty-nine persons, nineteen bicycles, thirteen canoes, many miles, one mountain, and an infinite number of black flies.

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Project Adventure
775 Bay Road
Hamilton, Ma. 01936
September 9, 1973

RC 012602

SUMMER TRIP EVALUATION

For three weeks during the month of July, a group of forty students bicycled and canoed in the wilderness areas of Maine and Canada under the aegis of Project Adventure. One group, the canoeists, navigated the Allagash River in northern Maine, while the cyclists pedaled from Holten, Maine to Prince Edward Island and back - covering a total of 800 miles. The two groups met in Baxter State Park to spend three days on a solo wilderness experience, to hike, and to climb Mt. Katahdin.

The majority of the forty students came from Hamilton-Wenham Regional High School; others came from Masconomet High, Newburyport High, and Andover High. They were accompanied by four staff members, two physical education teachers, and one administrator. The cost to students for the trip was sixty dollars to cover food, transportation by bus and rental truck, phone calls, films and camping fees. The canoes and camping equipment belonged to the Project. The cyclists had to supply their own ten-speed bicycles. Total cost to the Project was $2900 excluding gear and salaries.

Objectives

The trip was planned as an opportunity for any interested students from the region where the Project was based to participate in an extended and challenging group experience in the outdoors. Students were to learn new skills - bike and canoe techniques and repair, camping and navigational skills, as well as interpersonal skills, self-reliance, and initiative. The idea was to provide the students with a realistic yet meaningful challenge from which they could emerge with a sense of pride and accomplishment.

Other goals for the trip included:

1. mixing students from the different high schools that would be participating schools in the following year.

2. involving a minimum of three teachers in the trip as a means of teacher training in attitude, expectations, and relationships with kids.

3. providing participants with an opportunity for growth and development through

    - contacts with people living in remote areas
    - delegating responsibility to students
    - a three day solo/survival experince.

4. to involve a wide variety of students in the summer trip, rather than just "outing club" types.

Evaluation Methodology

Evaluation of the summer trip was done on both an informal and formal basis.

Informally, the staff evaluated the trip as an ongoing process and, if possible, made adjustments on the spot or plans for change in the following year. Most of these plans concerned logistics - storing the canoe rack, mailing food to the cyclists, taking courses on bicycle repairs, finding better ways to fold a wet tent, etc.

They also listened to student ideas and comments as well as remarks made by parents. At the end of the journey and periodically during the trip, staff and students sat down together for debriefing sessions as well.

Formal evaluation consisted of a questionnaire mailed to each of the forty participants in September. (See attached sheets and cover letter.) All but one of the questionnaires were returned and the results are summarized below. It should be pointed out that the purpose of the questionnaire was twofold: first, to ask students to evaluate the trip and second, to give them an opportunity to reflect on their own experience after the summer. Thus, some of the questions are of a thoughtful rather than a strictly evaluative nature.

Findings

Asked what motivated them to go in the first place, 25% mentioned "love of nature and the outdoors". Another 25% felt it would be a "good and challenging experience". Eight mentioned a desire for "whitewater canoeing" and five looked forward to "meeting new people". The remaining sixteen listed a variety of other reasons for going.

All but one of the respondents felt glad that they had gone and the one exception wrote "maybe" rather than "no" as an answer.

A projective question asked students what advice they would give a friend who was considering going on a similar trip. Sixteen wrote unreservedly "Go!" or something similar. Another fifteen advised that the participant get in good physical shape. Eleven felt that it was important to be prepared to accept or value the good with the bad times. Five recommended going "for the experience" and four for the "close relationships".

One student's succinct reply perhaps sheds greatest light on the feelings and attitudes engendered on the trip: "I'd definitely tell him to go. I'd tell him it didn't matter if he was strong or physical activity-oriented, that everyone helps everyone else . . . and sure it's hard at times, but what a feeling of satisfaction at the end of each day."

The students were also asked to rank a series of variables related to the trip in order of their importance. The largest number, 27, ranked "relationships formed with others" as most important to them. Many items were ranked "very important". Twenty-two said "the physical challenge" was second in importance. Twenty-one ranked "learning new outdoor skills", 20 mentioned "the coed side", and 18 reported that "natural beauty" was

SUMMER TRIP EVALUATION Name _____

1. What made you choose to go?

2. Are you glad you did it? _____ yes _____ no

3. A close friend is thinking about going on a similar trip, asks you what it was like and whether you recommend going. What advice would you give him?

4. Rate each of the following items on its importance to you:

1 = most important
2 = not very important
3 = very important
4 = did not matter to me

_____pure physical challenge

_____finishing successfully

_____relationships formed with others

_____people we met on the way

_____ natural beauty

_____the co-ed side

_____learning and using outdoor skills

5. Some people feel that trips like this are a valid and worthwhile form of education. Others think that investing the money and time in trips is just not as important as investing it in books, teacher salaries, equipment, etc. What would you say to someone who felt that trips had nothing educational to offer?

6. After coming back home, did you see or think about yourself differently? How?

7. Did others see any changes in you? What were they?

8. Describe your summer after the trip. How do you feel about the activities you've been involved in?

9. What led you to keep a log? Are you keeping one now?

10. How did you get the money for the trip?

11. After getting back, what did you find you missed about the trip?

12. How did you use your time on solo?

    Would you include a solo in next year's trip?

very important to them. The other two items - "finishing successfully" and "the people we met" seem to have been of lesser importance. Clearly, interpersonal relationships were the single most important part of the trip for about 3/4 of the participants.

Fifty percent of the students reported that their parents had given them the money to go. Fifteen had earned it on their own, and the remaining four had earned part of it.

As a means of evaluating changes in self-concept and behavioral change, students were asked "if they saw or thought about themselves any differently after the trip" and "if others saw any changes in them". Their answers were extremely varied. About 25% felt the same about themselves. Eight students mentioned feeling "proud of their accomplishments". Five felt they had become "more friendly" and four each mentioned feeling "physically stronger", "more confident", and "more life helping out at home." Over half the students mentioned changes that others had seen in them. Most of these were of a physical nature such as weight or strength and about five were related to growth in interpersonal areas.

Although no pattern emerged, some of the following quotes may give a flavor of the kind of effect that the trip had on students:

> "They said I looked older, but it was probably because of the dirt . . . They said I grew up some and became more sensitive to people's problems."
>
> "My friends noticed I was less lazy . . . and more willing to experience new things."
>
> "I don't worry nearly as much what people think of me and the way I dress, and things like that."

Before the trip, it was suggested that students might want to keep a log. All but five did so and five reported that they still continued to write regularly.

Asked what they missed about the trip afterwards, 22 mentioned the people and relationships, 14 the outdoor life, 11 the activity, and 7 said "everything". There were no negative replies - and everyone on the trip missed one aspect or another after their return. Nine mentioned on a different question that the rest of the summer had been a letdown for them.

At the end of the trip, each student spent three days alone - on solo. For many this was a profound experience - for others, it was a time of loneliness and/or surviving the blackflies. Asked to describe how they used their time on solo, 19 mentioned that they "thought a lot"; 18 mentioned "sleeping"; 14 listed books they had read. (Thoreau, the Bible, Bettleheim, and Faulker were typical.) Thirteen said they spent time writing; 7 that they walked and explored; 6 mentioned the bugs; and four reported having done some carving. None felt that the solo experience should be eliminated from the trip although several said that they would prefer not to do it again.

The following quotes best illustrate the variety and intensity of the three-day experience for these students:

"I spent my time thinking about my attitude toward life - how I could have tried harder and wasted less time . . . and about how quickly time passes."

"I spent my time hiding in my sleeping bag because of the bugs. I tried to have deep thoughts, but nothing would come."

"As far as thinking, my mind was dazzled with the effect that no eating had on me."

"I tried to slow myself down and think for a while. I wrote two songs . . . also I wrote a list of 200 or so of my favorite foods."

"I thought a lot and wrote a lot and also explored and observed animals."

The students were asked to justify the trip as an educational experience. This question was intended to focus their thoughts on what exactly they had each learned, but their replies are illuminating for evaluation as well:

"I think that it was important that many things were left up to us and not told to us. We weren't told how; it was up to us to decide for ourselves."

"On the bike trip we met so many nice people who told us about their lifestyles . . . we also learned more about each other. I read once that the only true way to learn is through personal experience. How else can a person know what something feels like or how beautiful it is sleeping out under the stars?"

"The type of education we receive in the classroom is very fine for some types of students . . . just as some students turn to industrial arts, there are those who are attracted to the more physical outdoor type learning. I think it's important for kids who reject English, math, and science to have some force incorporated in these courses to attract this type of student."

"I like learning by doing education. This way is a lot more fun because you're not keyed up by noisy teachers, homework, and classes."

"I am thoroughly convinced that this year in school will be much easier than last year because I learned how to deal with many problems and persevere and that if I try I can handle much more than I thought I could."

"Riding rapids and trekking through mud and swimming in streams and helping each other over rocks and being with good friends like ours cannot be felt and known by reading a book."

"I learned never to give up no matter how bleak things look and that applies to everything."

Conclusion

Clearly, the trip was successful in terms of its effect on students. All but one came back feeling glad they had gone. The questionnaires indicate a high degree of interpersonal relatedness and personal pride and enthusiasm. Staff evaluations indicated that the staff felt very good about the way the trip had gone and plans now are underway for a longer bicyling trip.

One of the unusual and unexpected strengths of the trip lies in the fact that an extremely varied group of students was able - in such a brief time, yet under fairly intense conditions - to become a cohesive group whose interaction continues even during the school year. Trip members included students of both sexes, from all four grades, in four different high schools. Some were outdoor enthusiasts, others were more aesthetic and/or intellectual, while still others had strong religious ties. By the end of the three week period, this diverse bunch had become a unit in which sex, grade, and interest differences were accepted within a functioning group. The continuing impact manifests itself in a variety of ways - the students at the high school just check in every couple of weeks to see what's going on; they have also organized three official reunions and, as one girl put it, "When I see kids from the trip in the hall, I don't need to say 'hi'; we just smile and everybody understands."

What factors account for this openness and ongoing spirit? Here is really the essential question and several answers seem to emerge. One is the particular structure of the trips, one in which students on each expedition were divided into smaller groups and given responsibility for everything from food distribution to navigation.

Beyond this was an attitude and a tone set by the group leaders - one of cheerfulness, cooperation, and shared responsibility. Just as the standards were high, so were the rewards. The students felt a pride in living up to the demands placed on them and in successfully negotiating the risks.

An unexpected bonus of the trip has been that because students from other schools went on the trip, the Project has found it easy to get started. The shared experience has meant that the Project's trips and plans have a built-in credibility among the students.

To: All Summer Participants

From: Mary Smith, Evaluator

Dear _____,

In order to make plans for next year and to get some ideas of the value of trips to students and the school, I would like for you to fill out the enclosed questionnaire. Please spend some time with it either at home or in a study, and give yourself a chance to really get into the feel of the trip. We will use your replies as the basis for a paper on the value of trips to education.

Please return the completed form to the Project Adventure office by Monday afternoon. Feel free to put any additional comments at the end. I'd like to see them.

Thanks.

P.S. If you are not a student at Hamilton-Wenham, please use the enclosed envelope to return your questionnaire.